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ABSTRACT

A review of literature on the use of wordless picture books to develop language skills is presented as background for the relatively brief description of a project in which wordless picture books were used with Latino children. The project is a collaborative one between Bloomsburg University, Kutztown University, and Thomas Ford Elementary School (Pennsylvania). Thomas Ford Elementary School currently serves a culturally diverse population which includes 74 percent Latino students. Based upon recognized needs of the Reading School District, this project's main objective is to enhance concept and language development in Latino children through the use of wordless picture books and to train teachers in the most effective use of these books. (IAH)

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT CHILDREN THROUGH STAFF DEVELOPMENT*

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ABSTRACT

This project is a collaborative project between Bloomsburg University, Kutztown University, and Thomas Ford Elementary School. Thomas Ford Elementary School currently serves a culturally diverse population which includes 74% Latino students. Administrators and faculty at Thomas Ford Elementary School consistently seek to improve upon their effectiveness with Latino students. Based upon recognized needs of the Reading School District, this project focuses on enhancing the capabilities of teachers of Latino students through intense, hands-on training in encouraging language and concept development drawing upon the language and experiences brought by Latino students through wordless picture books.

A great deal has been written concerning the importance of language in reading instruction and subsequent success in educational settings. More recently, teachers have been faced with the challenge of changing demographics and helping those students who come into the educational setting speaking a language other than English.

The ability and desire to read are fundamental to every child's success in school. Educators and researchers indicate much attention to reading and reading readiness skills in young children to ensure success throughout the educational process.

Preliminary census data (1990) finds that more than 12 million children live in homes in which a language other than English is spoken. Many of these children are poor, have few experiences beyond their immediate communities, and often do not have access to books or newspapers.

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Research has produced

> "overwhelming evidence to show that when both middle class and non-middle class children, no matter what their native language, dialect, or ethnic background came to school at the age of five or six, they have control of a fully-formed grammatical system" (Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez, 1972, p. 84).

That is, the language children feel most comfortable with, the one they have learned from infancy and actually think in, is their dominant language.

The ability of educators to recognize, appreciate, and make use of the dominant language to its fullest potential has proven to be a challenge. Baca and Cervantes (1984) maintain that the primary goal of bilingual education is not to teach English or a second language per se, but to teach children concepts, knowledge, and skills through the language they know best and to reinforce this information through the second language.

Based on this premise, teachers are provided training in the development of language and concepts through the use of wordless picture books. Wordless picture books have been defined as "books in which the picture alone tells the story" (Children's Book Council, 1974, pp. 83-84), "books which have no text, but present their message through pictures only" (Glazer, 1981, p. 4), "a series of printed pictures in book form which tell their story without a text (Herman,

narrative (story) told through illustrations alone" (Cain, 1985, P. 11), and books in which "the illustrations carry the whole load of the literary connotation" (Cianciolo, 1976, p. 3). These books may prove useful in enhancing essential literary comprehension and interpretative creativity in late learning stages. The continuing advancements of television, microcomputers, and other visual media in the field of education have made it imperative to produce books which appeal to children's modern visual awareness.

Carty (1983) asserts, "Visual literacy skills are neglected in most early primary grade classrooms. Yet most of what children learn comes to them through their eyes" (p. 199). Sampson (1983) also affirms, "Children are visually oriented. Television has become a strong pervasive element in the lives of most children...Wordless picture books are particularly helpful in stimulating language development of children" (p. 2). In books without words, the story line is told in illustration. The reader fills in all conversations between characters of explanations for the events. There is no right or wrong way to read this type of book (Clegg, et al, 1982). Carty also sees their value in this regard: "Before children learn to decode words they are free to learn skills needed for future reading...Having no words removes the fear of failing" (p. 175).

Stewig (1975) maintains that wordless picture books are useful tools in developing language skills in a no-risk situation:

> "A significant difference between those who use language easily and less competent language users is that the former are usually able to say something in several ways. Wordless picture books can be used effectively in asking children to take a story the artist has encoded in picture and re-encode it in their words. The ability to recast a message in another form is a major distinguishing characteristic of fluent communicators" (p. 6).

Wordless picture books have gained much support for researchers in the past decades. Emphasis lies in the usefulness of these books to teach skills in a wide variety of areas. Burns and Roe (1976) claim that picture interpretation is a natural step in the process of language development and that wordless picture books foster interpretation skills (p. 86). Carty believes that wordless picture books can be utilized as the foundation and motivating factor in a writing program (p. 196). D'Angelo (1981) and Bissett (1972) see the books as aiding educators in evaluating the learning potential of each child. Hillerick (1977) confirms the wordless picture books' use as a pre-reading instrument: "...the child who has the ability to verbally interpret picture possesses many of the basic oral skills necessary to read and understand print" (p. 41). Sutherland, et. al. (1981) assert that wordless picture books introduce children to the idea of

sequential action as pages are turned left-to-right and from front to back (p. 100). Carty extends the value of these books to the bilingual or ESL classroom, finding that the illustrations foster and create dialogue between the child and the teacher. In addition, a study by Brown (1988) revealed the need for further investigation of wordless picture books in bilingual/bicultural educational programs.

In the 1960's and early 1970's, the concept of "visual literacy" gained attention from educators interested in the reading acquisition process in children. An uncomplicated definition of visual literacy as the conception and decoding of a message from printed words and "printed" pictures (ideas in picture form) was provided be J. L. Debes and C. M. Williams in 1978. However, as early as 1970, Haber asserted that pictures are recalled differently than linguistic materials such as words and numbers - that pictures are not stored in words, and therefore cannot be recalled in words with detail. Haber thereby questions the idea of using wordless pictures for assessing comprehension. Dondis (1973) also states that visual literacy is more than observation, claiming that understanding is crucial to the concept: this understanding may be enhanced and developed through training, according to this viewpoint. Rohwer (1971) recommends that visual and verbal activities increase the power of learning, suggesting that information should be presented in a concrete way and that pictorial presentation precede verbal training.

Although Haber questioned the use of wordless picture books as a means of assessing comprehension, Carroll (1972) claims that wordless

picture books provide an excellent measure of comprehension, since there is no demand upon the decoding ability of the child in retelling parts of the narrative and there is no chance of repeating words without an understanding of their meaning. In an earlier study (1970) Debes and Fransecky also concluded that wordless picture books can be used as instructional material to enhance "verbal communication", in that they can provide the opportunity to direct children to use their existing passive vocabulary. Kossack and Bader (1980) affirm that visual literacy experience and training for children with pictorial materials help develop a positive attitude and confidence with basal reading materials.

Strandberg and Griffith (1969) examined the concept of visual literacy and concluded that most children develop a visual language vocabulary before they learn to speak. Visual skills and vocabulary are assumed, therefore, to be acquired informally in response to the environment, and visual and verbal vocabulary parallel one another. Braden and Hortin (1981) defined visual literacy as "...the ability to understand and use images, including the ability to think, learn, and express oneself in terms of images".

Interest in the relationship between children's ability to interpret visual stimuli and the development of language and reading skills intensifies as society becomes more visually oriented through television, video games, home video systems, and microcomputers. Read and Smith (1982) link these ideas to the introduction of wordless picture books into the pre-reading curriculum confirming that the

wordless picture book cannot replace picture books with words, but that they can enhance a child's visual literacy. A primary objective that they can enhance a child's visual literacy. A primary objective of the wordless picture book therefore is to assist children in contemplating what they observe.

Bettleheim and Zelan (1981) affirm that a teacher's presentation of reading and literature in school is the most important influence on a child's ability to read, and that learning to read will seem "more worthwhile" if the teacher makes it enjoyable and interesting. Wile (1980), in accordance with significant reading readiness skills identified by twelve experts, concludes that wordless books can assist in the development of interest, oral language, auditory perception, visual perception, responsibility and independent behavior, experiential background, abstract and problematic thinking, auditory and visual memory, cognitive concepts, general coordination, key vocabulary, and positive self-concept. A significant difference between those who use language easily and less competent language users is that the former are usually able to say something in several ways; wordless picture books can be used effectively in asking children to take a story the artist has encoded in picture and re-encode it in their own words (Stewing, 1985). Many reading skills are developed through the use of wordless picture books and they can

be particularly beneficial to culturally and linguistically different students (Flatley and Rutland, 1986). Educators can alleviate the fear many of these students demonstrate in learning to read because there is no printed information to cause failure anxiety. The fear of failure is removed.

Research has focused on the value of wordless picture books as preparatory tools for the teaching of reading and the appreciation of literature, and experimental studies have centered on children's responses to these books; however no work appears to have been done to determine whether children from urban, minority, or working-class backgrounds respond differently to wordless picture books that do not reflect their environment and experiences.

The present study attempts provide additional information in the areas dealing with the responses of children from urban, working-class and minority backgrounds when provided experiences with wordless picture books.

In designing this inservice program for teachers from Thomas Ford Elementary School, in the Reading School District, Reading, Pennsylvania, the first task was to identify ways in which the use of wordless picture books would support the existing curriculum and teaching efforts of teachers. Based on curriculum guides, it was determined the use of wordless picture books would support the existing curriculum in the following manner:

1. Encourage use of language.
2. Encourage expressive language.
3. Develop concepts.
4. Foster interpretation skills.
5. Develop oral language skills.
6. Develop a positive self-concept.
7. Enhance feelings of success.
8. Develop specific skills essential to the reading process.
9. Foster and create dialogue between teacher and child and between child and child.
10. Aid is enhancing visual literacy.
11. Foster comprehension through retelling of text.
12. Support and encourage use of "passive vocabulary".
13. Develop a positive attitude and confidence when encountering printed text.
14. Develop critical thinking skills (predicting, hypothesizing, cause and effect relationships, drawing inferences, drawing conclusions, forming judgments, evaluating).

The main objective of this inservice project is to enhance concept and language developing in Latino children through the use of wordless picture books through training of teachers in the most effective use of wordless picture books.

The project is divided into three phases, planning, implementation and evaluation. The planning stage involved pretesting of students and teachers. Evaluation instruments administered include the Boehm Concept Development Test and Teacher Efficacy Scale (Gibson, 1983)

and provision of training in the use of wordless picture books. The implementation phase includes actual implementation of classroom strategies with support from university personnel. Finally, the evaluation phase will include post-testing of students using the Boehm Concept Development Test. The amount of growth between pre and post testing will be measured for both groups.

It is anticipated that those teachers who undergo training will in turn provide training for colleagues in the immediate and surrounding district

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